**Melody Tinkham**

**EDU584, Spring 2012**

***The Book Thief & The Power of Words Unit***

**10th Grade Honors Classroom Profile**

**Demographics**

Honors English for tenth grade is open only to sophomore students. Freshman English teachers refer students for the course and those students must complete summer work to stay enrolled. Students in an honors class are working toward taking a further Honors English course their junior year, or moving up to the Advanced Placement course.

Regarding the makeup of this particular class of students, Figure 1 shows that it consists of six sophomores, two males and four females. The ethnicity break down is 83% Caucasian White and 16.67% Asian (see Figure 3). 16.67% of these students are eligible for free and reduced lunch. Among the six students there are no English Language Learners, no Special Education students, and no Gifted and Talented students. Title IA services are not offered at Mt. Blue High School. Out of the six students enrolled in this course, three learning styles are represented.

**Figure 1**

**Classroom Demographics (2011-12 School Year)**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Category** | **Number** | **Percentage** |
| **Gender** |  |  |
| Female | 4 | 66.67% |
| Male | 2 | 33.33% |
|  |  |  |
| **Ethnicity** |  |  |
| AAB=African American Black | 0 | 0.00% |
| AI=American Indian | 0 | 0.00% |
| A=Asian | 1 | 16.67% |
| H=Hispanic | 0 | 0.00% |
| CW=Caucasian White | 5 | 83.33% |
| NP=Not Reported | 0 | 0.00% |
|  |  |  |
| **Disability** |  |  |
| Yes | 0 | 0.00% |
| No | 6 | 100.00% |
|  |  |  |
| **English Language Learners** | |  |
| Yes | 0 | 0.00% |
| No | 6 | 100.00% |
|  |  |  |
|  |  |  |
| **Category** | **Number** | **Percentage** |
| **Free & Reduced Lunch** |  |  |
| Yes | 1 | 16.67% |
| No | 5 | 83.33% |
|  |  |  |
| **Title IA** |  |  |
| Yes | 0 | 0 |
| No | 0 | 0.00% |
|  |  |  |
| **Learning Styles** |  |  |
| VIS=Visual | 0 | 0.00% |
| VER=Verbal | 0 | 0.00% |
| LOG=Logical | 0 | 0.00% |
| SOL=Solitary | 2 | 33.33% |
| PHY=Physical | 1 | 16.67% |
| SOC=Social | 0 | 0.00% |
| AUR=Aural | 3 | 50.00% |

Figure 2 shows that the class is made up of two males and four females.

**Figure 2**

Figure 3 shows the ethnicity break down in the class is 83% Caucasian White and 16.67% Asian.

**Figure 3**

**Class Student Learning Profile**

Beginning midway through quarter three and ending at the beginning of quarter four, which consisted of eight weeks, students in this sophomore Honors English class completed a Power and Value of Words unit while reading Marcus Zusak’s novel *The Book Thief.* Besides reading the assigned novel, students took part in ten activities and assessments, of which six were assignments and four were in class activities. The four in class activities were formative assessments to check for understanding, while the six assignments were summative assessments. The completion rate for these assignments was quite high, with only 4.5 assignments out of a possible sixty being left incomplete. The resulting scores, therefore, generally reflect actual achievement. The average scores for the assignments are as follows: (Students were graded on a rubric numbered 1-4, 1 equaling a *does not meet the standard* and 4 equaling an *exceeding the standard*.)

• 2 Journal Writes (Formative): 3.67/4

• Blog Posts/1st half of novel (Summative): 3.58/4

• Blog Posts/2nd half of novel (Summative): 2.42/4

• Mood/Tone Text Markup (Formative): 3.4/4

• Mood/Tone Wordle Activity (Summative): 3.83/4

• Self/Peer Writing Reflection (Formative): 3.58/4

• *Book Thief* Inspired Writing Piece (Summative): 3.83/4

• i-Movie Project (Summative): 3.33/4

• Digital Portfolio (Summative): 3.67/4

The assignment scores throughout this unit were correlated with gender as well as aural learning styles. Since students seemed to enjoy the journal writing the least during the unit, Figures 4 and 5 were chosen to represent the correlations between journaling and both gender as well as the aural learning style, which makes up 50% of the student learning styles in the class.

Figure 4 shows that there is no correlation between gender and journal writing scores. Figure 4 also shows that there is a very weak negative correlation between the aural learning style and journal writing scores. Honestly, no strong correlation can be determined from such a small class size of six students. (Due to the large number of assignments in this unit, Figure 4 shows the correlations between gender/aural learning style and only a three out of the ten assignments from the unit.)

**Figure 4**

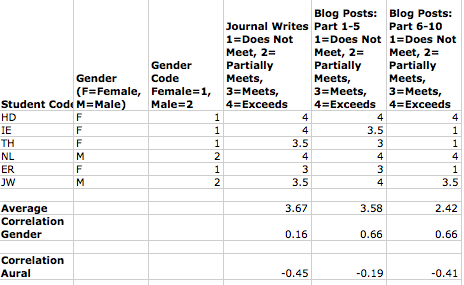
****

Figure 5 shows that there is no correlation between student gender and their scores for journal writing in the Honors English class.

**Figure 5**

**Perceptions**

After the class finished this unit, they were asked to complete an online survey, generated through Google Docs, consisting of nine questions and one additional space to leave optional feedback. The results of this survey are listed below in Figure 6. Only five out of the six students in the class completed the survey, so that one student should not be included when considering percentages. The results show that 80% of students enjoyed putting together their own digital portfolios, (40% of the class agreeing and 40% of them strongly agreeing that it was an enjoyable activity). Writing their own creative writing pieces inspired by the novel *The Book Thief* was one of the higher rated assignments, with 100% of students choosing either agree or strongly agree*.* Journaling and keeping blogs were assignments seemed to be less enjoyed by the students. 40% of students either disagreed or strongly disagreed that journaling was enjoyable and another 40% rated it in the middle of the scale. However, 60% of students agreed or strongly agreed that following their classmates’ blogs over the course of the unit was enjoyable.

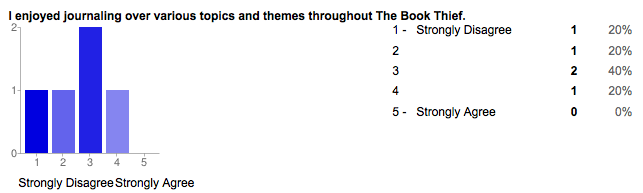
Three out of the five students who took the survey chose to leave additional comments on the survey. Some of the comments left consisted of the following statements:

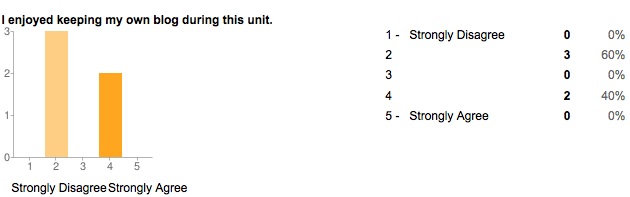
• “I am easily frustrated by technology, and this is why I wasn’t crazy crazy about this unit. I enjoyed the idea of it, and it was a good stretch for me.”

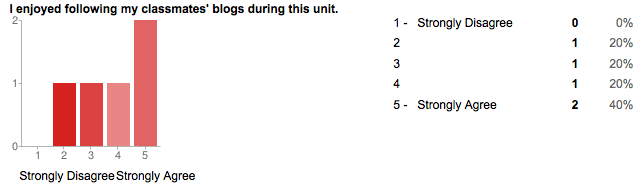
• “As far as discussion goes, I always enjoy class discussion versus blogging, but that might be because I enjoy talking out loud about books. I think my favorite part of this unit was the creative writing.”

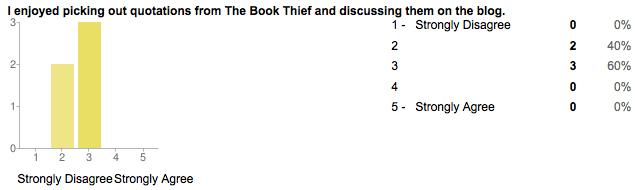
• “I was well prepared to detest the blogging, but I ended up enjoying the amount of creative freedom allowed in operating my own personal space. I also greatly respected your choice to allow simple restrictions on the creative projects. While most teachers give their students the daunting label of “anything,” restricting us to using i-Movie or a blog makes the whole creative process less stressful and more rewarding.”

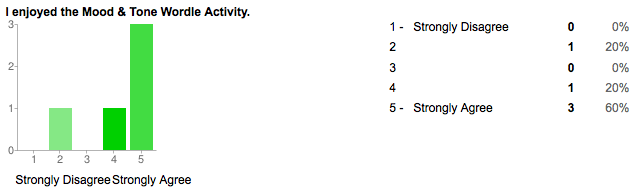
**Figure 5**

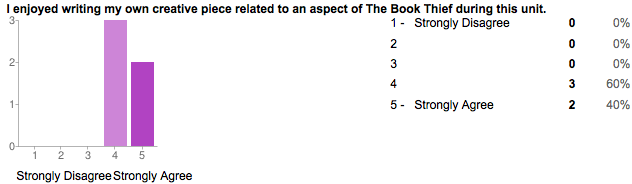


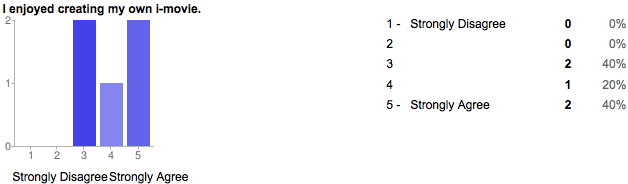


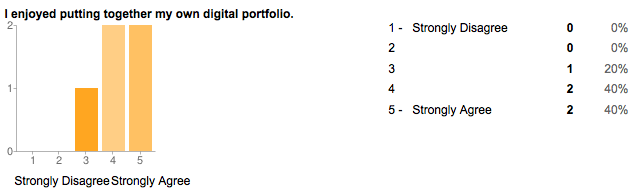


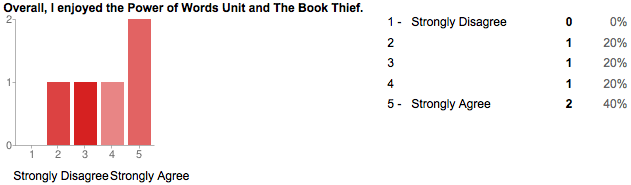












**Process**

This unit, which was meant to focus on the power and value of words, was originally conceived as a collaborative project between Social Studies and English classes at Mt. Blue High School. Jim Burrell, a Social Studies teacher at Mt. Blue, began working with Melody Tinkham, a member of the English Department, to create the unit targeting various examples of powerful words over the course of history. They worked backwards, following the Understanding By Design process conceived by Wiggins and McTighe, to incorporate multiple facets of understanding. The integration of Type II technology was also a focus of the unit, particularly incorporating blogging, the use of the wordle.net website, the use of i-Movie, and a presentation involving Adobe Digital Portfolio as a means of instruction as well as assessment. Students also completed a Googledocs survey and an online learning style survey during the unit.

**Classroom (Demographics, student learning, perception, processes) profile**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **1. What are the class’s *strengths* and *challenges?*** | |
| ***Strengths*** | *Challenges* |
| This class consists of highly motivated students.  The class consists of only six students therefore feedback was easier to give students in a timely manner.  Students in this class are able to work independently as well as interdependently.  There is a wide variety of learning styles in the class.  None of the students were Special Education students.  Almost all students completed most assignments in the unit.  The students who did complete all blog assignments for the entire unit received high grades and followed the blogging rubric requirements successfully. (I’m extremely pleased with the blogging rubric I created for this unit.) | The class is predominantly female.  There is very little diversity in the class.  The class consists of only six students, which lead to many difficulties.  One student was absent frequently toward the end of the unit and therefore did not complete the perception survey. (Due to the small number of students in the class this data would have been extremely valuable.)  Student blog following and commenting was manageable with six students, but not as rich as it could have been due to the small class size. Many students stopping doing the blog posts close to the end of the unit, which then limited the other students to an even smaller pool of blog posts to follow and comment on.  The social studies portion of the unit did not pan out, but plans have been solidified to push forward with this unit next year. (Possibly an essential question for both courses, Social Studies and English, for the entire year.) |
| **2. What are some *implications* for your unit?** | |
| 50% of the students in the class were strong aural learners therefore they followed directions carefully and didn’t need a large amount of clarification. This also led to students enjoying class discussion over the novel they read. They seemed to enjoy hearing what others had to say about the novel and various other aspects of the unit.  With 50% of the students being strong aural learners, they had a tendency to want to listen more than talk. I spent a lot of time prompting them during class discussions about the novel. Ironically, this was an activity that many of them enjoyed even though they had difficulty participating in the speaking part of the lesson. They enjoyed listening to one another a great deal. (Maybe with a larger class this would not have been such a challenge.)  Students indicated that they enjoyed projects in the unit such as making the i-Movie and putting together their digital portfolio more so than the blogging. This is evident in the second round of blog grades, which show a large number of the students who did not complete all their assigned posts. | |
| **3. Looking at the intersection of classroom demographics, student learning, perception and process, what conclusions and recommendations can you make regarding your class and the unit?** | |
| *The Book Thief* is a long text (over 500 pages) so I’d like to make a fee changes to how I teach the novel so that portion of the unit doesn’t seem so long and tedious for students. I’d like to make sure they see the relevance and importance behind the choosing of this text. These are a few ideas:  • While I will continue having students blog throughout this unit, I’d like to rethink the specific blog  assignments themselves and make them more interesting. A few students in the course lost interest in the  blog assignments toward the end of the unit, or failed to see the value in them and chose to make other work  a priority. I’d like to individualize the blog assignments more with what is going on in the world of the  novel, rather than have students just pull quotes out of every chapter. This might avoid the tediousness some  students felt.  • I’d like to find historical and current event examples of the power of words to pair with different parts of the  novel. This might help tie the book in more with the theme of the unit and help students see its relevance.  Some of the i-Movie projects were much more brief in length than I had anticipated. I did not assign a length to the project requirements, but it may be something I consider for next time. This could have the potential to improve the quality of the projects, but not necessarily.  I ran out of time and was forced to cut the slam poem assignment from the unit. I will keep that assignment in the unit and make time for it. I believe students would have enjoyed that assignment a great deal, especially since this particular group of students was 50% aural learning style. | |